

Aiding War or Peace? The Insiders' View on Aid to Postconflict Transitions

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International aid donors now allocate the majority of development assistance to conflict-affected countries. Aid scholarship largely classifies this subset of recipients as poorly governed countries where donors bypass the government in favor of third-party implementers. We argue that further disaggregation shows how donors use different aid types—humanitarian, transitional, development, and budgetary aid—to support postconflict transitions. We expect that when a postconflict country signals progression toward peace, donors will give development and budgetary aid to the government and withdraw humanitarian and transitional aid; when the country signals regression toward violence, donors will do the inverse. To test our expectations, we use an original survey-embedded experiment completed by 1,130 aid experts around the globe. Our findings generally support our expectations, although they reveal important nuances. In particular, they show that experts are more certain of how donors aid countries that are progressing toward peace than those that are returning to war.

Since 2014, international aid donors have given the majority of official development assistance (ODA) to fragile and conflict-affected countries, where poverty and violence are increasingly concentrated (Corral et al. 2020; OECD 2020).¹ Donors aim to use this aid to address these countries' urgent humanitarian needs and support successful postconflict transitions to sustainable economic development (Collier 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2002; UN General Assembly 2015; United Nations and World Bank 2018).² These efforts are particularly visible in postconflict countries, where donors simultaneously al-

locate a mixture of aid types, as compared to war-torn countries where they may only provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance or stable democracies where they primarily allocate economic development aid (OECD 2010b; UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change 2004).³ Postconflict countries are also highly dependent on ODA, compared to other financial flows, giving donors the potential to influence their progression toward peace or regression toward war (OECD 2020, 45).

The aid-allocation literature tends to classify postconflict countries as poorly governed states where donors simply

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1. ODA comprises “flows of official financing administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective” (OECD 2008, 376). In 2018, donors gave 63% of total net country-allocable ODA (US\$60.3 billion) to fragile and conflict-affected countries (OECD 2020, 47). The OECD classifies 57 countries and territories as fragile, with 13 of these countries denoted as extremely fragile due, in part, to high levels of violent conflict (15–16).

2. This article focuses on donors belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—the 36 largest bilateral donors, excluding China—and the main multilateral donors that OECD member-states govern.

3. Postconflict countries are those that have experienced civil war, negotiated a comprehensive peace agreement, and held their first round of democratic elections (Boyce 2013). A comprehensive peace agreement results from a peace process with the main conflict actors and aims to address the political, economic, social, and security issues that drive the conflict (Joshi and Quinn 2017, 881).

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bypass the government and give aid to third-party implementers (Dietrich 2013; Knack 2013; Winters 2010). Studies of disaggregated aid-allocation behavior in conflict-affected countries find that donors give aid in response to localized political violence (Bezerra and Braithwaite 2016; Findley et al. 2011) and humanitarian need (Narang 2014, 2015); they do not analyze the simultaneous allocation of different aid types, each of which may have a different effect, or their relationship to conflict and peace dynamics (Campbell, Findley, and Kikuta 2017). The civil war literature, in contrast, argues that understanding war-to-peace transitions requires an analysis of how actors respond to and influence both conflict and peace dynamics, although it largely omits aid donors from this analysis (Cederman and Vogt 2017; Kalyvas 2003; Mason and Mitchell 2016). Building on this scholarship, we contend that to understand how donors influence postconflict transitions, we first need to understand disaggregated aid-allocation patterns in these contexts.⁴ To this end, we ask: How do donors allocate different types of aid to postconflict countries? Does this aid-allocation behavior change in response to conflict and peace dynamics on the ground?

During postconflict transitions, donors have four primary types of aid at their disposal: humanitarian aid, transitional aid, standard development project and program aid, and budgetary aid (OECD 2010a). Each of these types of aid has a different purpose and mode of delivery (Bandstein 2007). The purpose of humanitarian aid is to save lives, and donors tend to deliver it via third-party implementing partners that largely circumvent the government. Donors allocate transitional aid to build the government's political institutions and capacity to make the war-to-peace transition and tend to allocate it to third-party implementing partners that collaborate directly with the government. Development aid aims to reduce poverty and build state capacity to achieve global development targets (UN General Assembly 2015). Donors allocate development aid to third-party actors to implement development projects and sectoral programs, in collaboration with the recipient government, and directly to the government to build its service delivery capacity. Budgetary aid aims to support the government's policies by providing unearmarked aid directly to the government's budget (DAC 2012).

We advance the theory that donors to postconflict countries allocate these different types of aid in response to shifts in the country's political and security dynamics. More specifically, we expect that when postconflict countries signal that they are progressing toward peace, donors will decrease humanitarian aid that bypasses the government and increase de-

4. We build on similar claims made by Böhnke and Zürcher (2013), Findley (2018), Findley et al. (2011), and Zürcher (2017).

velopment and budgetary aid that directly supports the postconflict government. When postconflict countries signal that they are regressing toward potential renewed war, we expect that donors will increase humanitarian and transitional aid and decrease development and budgetary aid.

These aid-allocation patterns are related to two potentially competing donor motivations. On the one hand, to support successful postconflict transitions donors have committed to responding to rapidly changing political and security dynamics within the recipient country (IDPS 2011; UN General Assembly 2005). On the other hand, each type of aid has specific rules and modalities that determine when, where, and how it can be spent, which limits donors' options for responding to these changing political and security dynamics (Bandstein 2007; Campbell 2018).⁵ We, thus, contend that because donors are both motivated to respond to the political and security dynamics within a postconflict transition and limited in how they can respond, donors will exhibit similar aid-allocation behaviors in countries that signal similar political and security dynamics.

To test the observable implications of our theory, we surveyed 1,130 aid workers. We embedded an experiment in each survey in which respondents were presented with one of four randomly assigned, hypothetical postconflict country scenarios that varied in whether the country was progressing toward peace or regressing toward war. This elite survey experiment allowed us to address potential social desirability and selection bias and identify shared patterns of behavior across donors and postconflict contexts (Dietrich, Hardt, and Swedlund 2021).⁶ It also enabled us to capture shifts in donor behavior overlooked by observational studies that focus on cross-national analyses, not within-country change, and rely on donor-reported aid data about multiyear, planned projects that may not capture unplanned shifts in response to a dynamic context (Campbell et al. 2017; Natsios 2011; OECD 2019; Tierney et al. 2011).

To field our survey, we compiled a novel respondent pool of 12,000 staff of OECD donors and their implementing partners around the world. Our pool includes managers and staff of bilateral and multilateral donor country offices and

5. Donors' legislative bodies and headquarters often develop these rules for more stable contexts, not dynamic postconflict transitions. For further discussion of the misalignment between aid rules and on-the-ground needs, see Campbell (2018), Gibson et al. (2005), Martens et al. (2002), and Natsios (2011).

6. Aid experiments rarely focus on donor behavior, instead evaluating citizen perceptions or aid impact (Banerjee et al. 2015; Dietrich, Mahmud, and Winters 2018; Findley et al. 2017). Swedlund (2017) is the only other study that we know of that uses a survey experiment to elicit the opinion of donors about development aid.

their implementing partners—multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and national nongovernmental organizations (NNGOs). These aid experts observe exactly how donors allocate aid on the ground and are arguably best placed to identify how a range of donors respond to nuanced changes in postconflict countries' political and security dynamics.

Our results, which broadly support our theoretical expectations, point to several important findings. First, using novel data from an understudied expert-level population, this article shows that donors exhibit consistent patterns of allocation of four aid types in response to the same postconflict political and security dynamics. This provides a further disaggregated corrective to the aid-allocation literature's focus on studying each type of aid separately, on viewing postconflict countries as those in which donors simply bypass the government, and on primarily analyzing the effect of donor strategic interest on aid-allocation patterns (Findley 2018; Zürcher 2017). Second, our findings indicate that aid donors may be more effective at supporting countries that are progressing toward postconflict peace than at sanctioning countries that are regressing back toward war, potentially reducing the ability of third-party and domestic efforts to rescue faltering postconflict transitions (Matanock 2020; Walter, Howard, and Fortna 2021). Third, our findings demonstrate that donors are likely to allocate transitional aid across all postconflict scenarios, which indicates that this type of aid may be the most adapted to postconflict contexts, even though it is the least well-financed type of ODA (OECD 2020, 51, 77).

POSTCONFLICT AID: BUYING FRIENDS OR PEACE

Much of the aid-allocation literature views aid as a tool that bilateral aid donors use to “buy” unrelated policy concessions from recipient governments, furthering donors' strategic interests (Alesina and Dollar 2000; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009, 2013; Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele 2008; Schraeder, Hook, and Taylor 1998). Other scholarship challenges this contention, arguing that responding to strategic interests and recipient needs are not mutually exclusive (Bermeo 2017; Berthélemy 2006; Büthe, Major, and de Mello e Souza 2012; Feeny and McGillivray 2008; Heinrich 2013; Hoeffler and Outram 2011). These scholars claim that since poor countries are often sources of insecurity, migration, and terrorism for donor countries, donors have a strategic interest in providing aid to recipient governments that can contain these threats (Bermeo 2017). Donors may also allocate aid to recipient countries for other reasons, including when recipient countries mirror donors' regime type (Bermeo 2011), their economic policy (Dietrich 2021), or the preferences of domestic interest groups or political parties (Kleibl 2013). While this aid-

allocation literature indicates that donors are likely to have mixed motives for allocating aid to poor countries, it does not tell us how donors are likely to allocate aid to poor countries that are also affected by civil war.

The literature on aid allocation to war-torn countries finds that donors allocate aid in response to humanitarian need and political violence; however, this literature focuses only on conflict events, not peace events, and does not compare across types of aid (Bezerra and Braithwaite 2016; Findley et al. 2011; Narang 2015). The literature on aid effectiveness in conflict-affected countries argues that political and security dynamics, at both the national and local level, condition the effectiveness of aid to these contexts but does not explain how these dynamics shape the effectiveness of different types of aid (Anderson 1999; Collier 2003; De Waal 1997; Findley 2018; Haass 2021; Narang 2014; Terry 2002; Uvin 1998; Wood and Sullivan 2015; Zürcher 2017).

The civil war literature argues that UN peacekeeping and other third-party interventions reduce the likelihood of war recurrence in postconflict countries when they reinforce, and thus respond to, inclusive political and security arrangements; nonetheless, it does not examine the influence of different aid types on these third-party interventions or war recurrence (Fortna 2008; Joshi, Melander, and Quinn 2017; Matanock 2020; Walter 2002). In sum, while the literature on third-party interventions in war-torn countries indicates that donors can respond to conflict dynamics, and that these responses shape aid effectiveness, it does not tell us how donors actually allocate different types of aid in response to conflict dynamics or how these aid-allocation patterns shape postconflict transitions.

THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

We advance a theory that donors increase and decrease four types of aid—humanitarian, transitional, development, and budgetary—in response to signals that a postconflict country is progressing toward or regressing away from donors' vision of postconflict peace. When the postconflict political and security context signals high levels of progression toward peace, we expect donors to respond by (a) increasing development and budgetary aid types that directly support the recipient government and its policies and by (b) decreasing humanitarian and transitional aid that directly supports the population and peace process, respectively. When the postconflict country signals only moderate progress toward these indicators of peace, the donor response should remain the same except budgetary aid should decrease. When the country signals high levels of regression away from peace, we expect donors to respond by (a) decreasing transitional, development, and budgetary aid types that directly support the government and by (b) increasing humanitarian aid that aims to respond directly to the needs

of the population. When the country signals only moderate regression, the donor response should remain the same except that transitional aid should increase to help keep the peace process on track.

We assume that even when aggregate levels of all aid types combined remain constant, donors are likely to shift the disaggregated aid types in response to common political and security signals. We expect these patterns to be similar across donors and postconflict countries for two reasons. First, OECD donors have adopted a shared vision of postconflict success and failure and are, thus, likely to view the same events in similar ways (IDPS 2011; United Nations and World Bank 2018). Second, foreign policy bureaucracies, such as those that allocate aid, tend to choose the same policy options when responding to similar signals from their policy context, rather than developing new solutions to each context (Feldman and March 1981; March 1999; Martens et al. 2002). These expectations align with the OECD's claim that aid allocation in postconflict follows a relatively standard approach: "donor financing decisions are frequently based on a system of predetermined actions and instruments, triggered by a standard set of chronological events" (2010b, 17).

Below, we describe in further detail each aid type, the variation in political and security events that donors are likely to view as indicators of a postconflict country's progression toward peace or regression toward potential war, and our specific hypotheses about donor responses to four combinations of these political and security events.

Donor aid types and modalities

Donor aid allocation to postconflict countries is limited by the types of aid donors have at their disposal and the delivery modalities—also referred to as aid instruments—associated with each type. We focus our analysis on four main types of ODA: humanitarian, transitional (e.g., peace-building, governance, or democratization aid), development, and budgetary aid. These types of aid differ in their aims and in whether they (a) bypass the government completely in favor of a third-party organization that does not directly collaborate with the government, (b) allocate aid through third-party organizations that directly support the government, or (c) give aid directly to the recipient government's budget.

Humanitarian aid is focused on short-term lifesaving assistance and tends to bypass the government (Development Initiatives 2019, 73). It supports the delivery of goods and services directly to the population via third-party actors, potentially without direct collaboration with the recipient government (OECD 2017). *Transitional aid* also bypasses the government and is the only type of aid that is designed for risky and uncertain postconflict contexts (OECD 2012). It aims to

"build the capacity of nascent government structures" and "covers a broad spectrum of activities that traditionally falls between 'humanitarian' and 'development' categories, including recovery and reconstruction activities and security related and peacebuilding activities" (OECD 2010b, 15–16). Donors often allocate transitional aid to third-party actors who directly support the capacity of the recipient government and civil society organizations (OECD 2010a).

Donors allocate *development aid* to support the recipient government's capacity to implement its development policy and achieve global development targets, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (OECD 2010b; UN General Assembly 2015, 23). Development aid primarily uses two modalities: project support and sector program support (Bandstein 2007, 9). In conflict-affected countries, donors often allocate project support to third-party actors who collaborate with the government but do not use government systems (Bandstein 2007; Chandy, Seidel, and Zhang 2016, 8). Donors often give sector program support to a pooled fund managed by the donors and the recipient government, spreading the risk among the donors (Bandstein 2007, 10).

Donors give *budgetary aid* directly to the recipient government's budget; it is "unmarked contributions to the government budget with the purpose of implementing poverty reduction strategies, macroeconomic or structural reforms" (SIDA 2019, 42). Often referred to as budgetary support, this type of aid "is not linked to specific projects and includes a lump-sum transfer of foreign exchange" (Bandstein 2007, 9).

We now discuss the types of events in a postconflict country that donors are likely to view as signaling a postconflict country's progression toward peace or regression toward potential war.

Progression toward postconflict peace or regression toward civil war?

In policy documents produced over the past decade, the OECD, the World Bank, and the United Nations have outlined a common model of what they view as successful postconflict transitions (IDPS 2011; United Nations and World Bank 2018; World Bank 2011). These agenda-setting organizations contend that for postconflict states to eventually become liberal democracies grounded in rule of law and market-based economies, the postconflict government needs to implement a comprehensive peace agreement that establishes legitimate political institutions that, in turn, enable population-focused security (United Nations and World Bank 2018).⁷

7. We are not arguing that this is the right model for postconflict states, just that donor policy documents advance this model. For debates about the relevance of this "liberal peace" model for postconflict states, see Akokpari and Ancas (2013) and Campbell, Chandler, and Sabaratnam (2011).

Legitimate politics refers to “inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution” mechanisms that address the war’s political cleavages and enable the peaceful resolution of conflict (IDPS 2011, 2). *Population-focused security* refers to the capacity of these legitimate political institutions to “establish and strengthen people’s security” (2). While these policy documents build on findings from the academic literature and provide a clear overall vision of the type of legitimate politics and security that donors want to foster, they do not indicate which types of events donors should support and which ones they should seek to discourage (World Bank 2011). Drawing on donor policy documents and related academic scholarship, we posit that there is, nonetheless, a common set of political and security events that OECD donors and their implementing partners view as signaling a postconflict country’s progression toward peace and regression back toward potential war.

First, we turn to events that are likely to signal to donors that a postconflict country—one that has experienced war or significant armed violence, undergone a peace process, and held its first round of democratic elections—is making high or low levels of progress toward legitimate politics. The scholarship on postconflict transitions generally supports donors’ contention that the implementation of a comprehensive peace agreement reinforces legitimate politics by enabling inclusive power-sharing arrangements (Cammatt and Malesky 2012; Hartzell and Hoddie 2007; Joshi and Quinn 2015; Stedman, Rothchild, and Cousens 2002), democratic elections (Gleditsch and Ruggeri 2010), and the creation of independent civil society and media (Bratton and Chang 2006; Diamond 1999).

Consequently, we expect signals that a postconflict country is progressing toward legitimate politics to include the implementation of the peace agreement, evidence of amicable power sharing between the government and opposition groups, additional rounds of free and fair democratic elections, the peaceful transfer of power following these democratic elections, and an increasingly independent civil society and media. Because the ideal model of legitimate politics includes all of these characteristics, we contend that postconflict countries with more of these characteristics signal higher levels of legitimate politics. In contrast, signals that a postconflict country is regressing away from legitimate politics are likely to include a reduction in the independence of civil society and media, the exclusion or repression of opposition groups by the government, and the use of violence by the government and opposition groups. Because legitimate politics aims to stop the violent resolution of political disputes, we contend that the use of violence and opposition signals the lowest levels of legitimate politics.

Second, we address the events that are likely to signal high or low progress on population-focused security from the above

baseline postconflict conditions. Scholarship supports donor claims that the implementation of the legitimate politics provisions in peace agreements should enable population-focused security by reducing armed-group violence (Fortna 2008; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Walter 2002), enabling the population to move more freely about the territory and engage in normal economic and social activity (Uvin 2013), and improving the accountability of the security institutions to the population (Karim 2020). While the signals of legitimate politics, outlined above, focus on specific institutional reforms, the signals that the country is progressing toward or regressing away from population-focused security focus on the easily observable effects of these reforms on the population. We contend that a postconflict country where there is no reported violence against civilians or where civilians can move about the territory freely is likely to signal progression toward population-focused security. Signals of regression on population-focused security are likely to include reports of armed-group violence against civilians or displacement of civilians because of violence.

Hypotheses: Matching aid types to postconflict events

We group the indicators of legitimate politics and population security, discussed above, to create four hypothetical scenarios—strong peace, mild peace, mild violence, and strong violence—that mirror real-world postconflict contexts.⁸ These four scenarios represent degrees of change in the country context from a common baseline: a postconflict country that has experienced a civil war or significant armed violence, undergone a peace process, and held its first round of democratic elections. Our hypotheses capture how we expect donors to allocate four aid types—humanitarian, transitional, development, and budgetary—in response to the change between our baseline postconflict condition and each scenario. We depict our hypotheses in table 1 and explain them below.

Strong peace. In contexts where postconflict countries exhibit high levels of progress toward legitimate politics and population-focused security—signaled, for example, by a second round of free and fair democratic elections and a flourishing independent media and civil society—we expect that donors will decrease humanitarian and transitional aid. We expect decreases in humanitarian aid because of the absence of a clear humanitarian emergency to which this type of aid aims to respond (Scott 2014). Donors are likely to increase development and budgetary aid because the recipient country will

8. See app. A for examples of these scenarios in 54 countries. Appendixes A and B are available online.

Table 1. Expectations for Aid-Allocation Behavior in Postconflict Countries

	Strong Peace	Mild Peace	Mild Violence	Strong Violence
Legitimate politics	High	Moderate	Low	Low
Population security	High	High	Moderate	Low
Humanitarian aid	↓	↓	↑	↑
Transitional aid	↓	↑	↑	↓
Development aid	↑	↑	↓	↓
Budgetary aid	↑	↓	↓	↓

have satisfied the minimum requirements for a multiyear development cooperation agreement, including the government stability necessary to develop and implement a viable economic development policy (OECD 2010b, 2012). Donors may also increase development and budgetary aid to reward the recipient government’s progress in implementing its peace agreement (OECD 2010b). We expect increases in budgetary aid because donors are likely to view strong signals of inclusive politics and population-focused security as indicators of increased budget-management capacity and reduced risk that budgetary aid will directly or indirectly support increased military expenditures or violent conflict (IMF 2015; Nilsson 2004). We expect decreases in transitional aid because donors are now able to engage in normal development cooperation with the recipient government—donors’ preferred aid arrangement—and are, thus, no longer required to use more cumbersome transitional modalities (OECD 2010b, 2017; Oxfam 2019).

H1. Strong Peace: Signals that a postconflict country is making high levels of progress toward legitimate politics and population-focused security lead to decreases in humanitarian and transitional aid and increases in development and budgetary aid.

Mild peace. In postconflict countries that exhibit moderate levels of progress toward legitimate politics and high levels of progress toward population-focused security—signaled, for example, by the implementation of components of peace agreements and an increased sense of security among the civilian population—we expect donors to decrease humanitarian aid, increase transitional and development aid, and decrease budgetary aid. We expect donors to decrease humanitarian aid because of the absence of signals of humanitarian need. We expect increases in transitional and development aid because donors want to supplement the government’s capacity to implement the peace agreement and deliver goods and services to the war-affected population (OECD 2011). Donors are likely to decrease budgetary aid because the government has

not yet demonstrated its full commitment to creating democratic institutions that donors believe will support legitimate politics, such as by holding a second round of free and fair elections.

H2. Mild Peace: Signals that a postconflict country is making moderate levels of progress toward legitimate politics and high levels of progress toward population-focused security lead to decreases in humanitarian aid, increases in transitional and development aid, and decreases in budgetary aid.

Mild violence. We expect that when donors receive signals of low levels of progress toward legitimate politics and moderate progress toward population-focused security—signaled, for example, when the host government fails to respect the power-sharing conditions outlined in its peace agreement or places restrictions on opposition politicians, the media, or civil society—donors will increase humanitarian and transitional aid and decrease development and budgetary aid. We expect donors to decrease development and budgetary aid because of the increased likelihood that this financial support for the government will directly or indirectly facilitate increased violence and oppression (DAC 2014). Donors may also seek to punish the government for renegeing on its commitments to legitimate politics (OECD 2010b). We expect donors to increase transitional aid to help facilitate dialogue among the parties to the peace agreement (OECD 2020, 69–73) and increase humanitarian aid in order to continue engaging with the postconflict country—now that development and budgetary aid are no longer feasible—and to respond to humanitarian needs (OECD 2010b).

H3. Mild Violence: Signals that a postconflict country is making low levels of progress toward legitimate politics and moderate levels of progress toward population-focused security lead to increases in humanitarian and transitional aid and decreases in development and budgetary aid.

Strong violence. When donors observe that the postconflict country is violating its commitment to legitimate politics and population-focused security—signaled, for example, by the death and displacement of civilians because of violence between opposition groups and the government—we expect donors to increase humanitarian aid and decrease transitional, development, and budgetary aid. In addition to the reasons for decreases in development and budgetary aid articulated for mild violence, we expect that strong violence contexts will lead to decreases in transitional aid because open violence by the government and opposition indicates that the comprehensive peace agreement is unraveling, which removes the framework for legitimate politics that transitional aid aims to reinforce (OECD 2012). We expect donors to increase humanitarian aid because it enables them to continue to allocate aid to the postconflict country in the face of decreases in the other three types of aid and respond to the increased humanitarian needs of the internally displaced population (Borton, Smith, and Otto 2005; OECD 2010b).

H4. *Strong Violence:* Signals that a postconflict country is making low levels of progress toward legitimate politics and population-focused security lead to increases in humanitarian aid and decreases in transitional, development, and budgetary aid.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To test our hypotheses about donor aid-allocation behaviors in postconflict countries, we designed a survey experiment in which over 1,130 aid experts working in 186 countries took part (out of a total pool of 12,000 experts contacted).⁹ We randomly assigned each respondent one of four informational vignettes, which describe a hypothetical postconflict country (country A) and vary in the degree to which the political and security context signals progression toward or away from postconflict peace, as outlined in our theoretical framework. In this article, we refer to these scenarios as strong peace, mild peace, mild violence, and strong violence; we do not attach labels to the informational vignettes in the survey. For our outcome variable, we use a survey question that asks whether, in country A, the respondents believe that their organization (in cases where the respondents worked for a donor organization) or their main donor (in cases where the respondents worked for an implementing agency) would (a) increase, (b) decrease, or (c) not change the amount of

(1) humanitarian, (2) transitional, (3) development, and (4) budgetary aid allocated to the postconflict country.¹⁰

We opted for an experimental approach, instead of regular surveys, because it addresses potential social desirability bias that might lead donors and implementing partners to select aid-allocation behaviors that reflect how they think donors should respond across different scenarios rather than how they actually respond to a single scenario (Morton and Williams 2010; Mutz 2011). Furthermore, because we gave respondents limited information about the postconflict country, and no information about prior aid allocation to that country, we are able to address potential selection bias by isolating the effect of the country's security and political events on aid-allocation responses.¹¹ By formulating each of our treatment vignettes as a stylized description of a hypothetical country that is based on real-world contexts (see app. A), we are able to account for the diverse experiences of our aid experts across countries while still focusing on the particular circumstances of postconflict countries.

In establishing our pool of potential survey respondents, we strove to include as many aid experts as possible from the broader population of leadership and management staff working for OECD donors; the multilateral organizations that they govern; and the INGOs, NNGOs, and private contractors who serve as their implementing partners. As discussed in appendix A, the breadth of conflict-affected countries and organizations represented by our sample and respondent pool points to the validity of our results across a wide range of country contexts and donors. Furthermore, the distribution of our actual respondents among the different types of donors and implementing partners mirrors the proportions in our respondent pool (see app. A). Most of our respondents work for multimandate organizations—organizations giving or receiving humanitarian, development, transitional, and budgetary aid—giving them direct experience with donor aid-allocation behaviors across these types of aid. In addition, the majority of our respondents worked for implementing partners of OECD donors, not donor organizations themselves, giving them an overview of the behavior of a range of different donors. While donors are likely to be aware of the policy frameworks discussed in our theoretical framework, this is less likely for implementing partners; instead, their indications of donor behavior are likely to be based on their

9. We fielded our survey in July and August 2017 and March 2018. Most expert-based survey experiments employ smaller samples. For example, Hafner-Burton et al. (2014) survey 92 US policy elites, and Tomz, Weeks, and Yarhi-Milo (2020) survey 87 Knesset members.

10. For this article, we created four different dependent variables—one per type of aid—each with three possible values (i.e., increase, decrease, no change). See figs. 14 and 15 for the associated survey questions.

11. To address the literature's strategic interest hypothesis, we randomly include in half the treatment scenarios a statement that the country is a strategic priority for the donor (see fig. 12 for a discussion of the related results).

firsthand knowledge of the actual aid-allocation behaviors on which their organizations depend (Cooley and Ron 2002). Crucially, over 60% of our aid experts reported having experienced the hypothetical postconflict scenario randomly assigned to them (see fig. 12), demonstrating that our treatment vignettes convey information about actual countries with which they are familiar.¹²

Each of our treatment vignettes is a bundled treatment consisting of one piece of information about population-focused security and one about legitimate politics, as outlined in our theoretical framework.¹³ These informational vignettes are not intended to represent all scenarios in all postconflict countries; instead, they are intended to reflect four typical scenarios that donors are likely to view as signaling clear progression or regression toward postconflict peace, which our aid experts are likely to experience in actual postconflict countries. As depicted in table 4, these vignettes reflect recent events in 54 of the countries in which our respondents were based. In differentiating our treatments, we follow an approach used in other survey experiments (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009; Sagan and Valentino 2017): two of our vignettes (strong violence and strong peace) represent extreme cases, and two vignettes (mild violence and mild peace) represent associated moderate scenarios.

To establish the same baseline for each country A scenario, we precede each treatment vignette with an identical short description of country A as a postconflict country that has experienced civil war or significant armed violence, undergone a peace process, and organized its first round of democratic elections (see table 2). The relationship between the initial uniform prompt and each randomized vignette represents a change in country A's political and security context that we expect to signal to donors that the postconflict country is making mild or strong progression toward peace or regression toward war.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

We present the results from our survey-embedded experiment using two figures. Figure 1 provides a descriptive graphical overview of the number of experts endorsing increase, decrease, or no change for each of the four aid types in re-

sponse to the four treatment vignettes. Figure 2 depicts the predicted probabilities from a multinomial regression analysis of the shift in each aid type given each treatment vignette. These results reflect our broad theoretical expectations for donor responses to progression toward and regression away from signals of postconflict peace, with the exception of transitional aid (figs. 1B and 2B).

When responding to our two treatments that signal progression toward postconflict peace—the first two bars in each panel in figure 1 (strong and mild peace)—our experts indicate that donors will increase transitional, development, and budgetary aid and decrease humanitarian aid. One respondent described this pattern: “With declining tensions and peace agreement being implemented, our organization would slowly work with the country to provide developmental aid, and this means shifting from emergency/recovery aid to supporting social and/or infrastructure sectors” (respondent 709, QID233, QID108). Another respondent pointed to the importance of additional postconflict elections in solidifying the shift to development and away from humanitarian aid. “Several post-conflict election cycles along a positive trajectory help to normalize the situation and increase donor confidence to take more risk directly through bilateral programs and increased funding. This also includes a transition from humanitarian and peacebuilding-related initiatives to longer-term development interventions” (respondent 477, Q226, QID117). Another commented that “most donors place a high premium on elections, . . . they are signs of stability and transition” (respondent 450, Q226, QID117). An additional respondent pointed to donors' underlying logic: “humanitarian aid should be adapted as per the needs of the population while transition or development should be conditioned to the willingness of the government to respect some basic democratic principles” (respondent 241, QID112, QID193).

When responding to our treatments signaling regression toward potential renewed war—the last two bars in each panel in figure 1 (strong and mild violence)—our respondents indicate that donors will increase humanitarian and transitional aid and decrease development and budgetary aid. One respondent explained the logic behind these aid shifts: “Aid in the humanitarian sector inevitably is increased in crisis/transition areas as this is the way that countries can continue to provide assistance without making a political commitment. Donors tend to prefer to fund humanitarian appeals because (1) the humanitarian cycle is 1 year, (2) the funding is tracked by international humanitarian coordination tracking systems, and (3) it is highly visible. Hence, a donor can say that whilst it is imposing sanctions or other punitive measures on a country, it is not allowing the population to suffer due to grand politics” (respondent 215, QID233,

12. For respondents who had not experienced their assigned scenario, the survey read: “If you have not experienced or observed the context described in Country A, please just tell us your opinion in response to the questions below.”

13. For comparability, each treatment has a similar length and level of detail. We pretested our survey with respondents from our pool based in New Guinea.

Table 2. Survey Experiment Treatments

	Treatment
Uniform prompt	[Country A] is a postconflict country, which means that it has experienced civil war or significant armed violence. It has undergone a peace process and has held its first round of democratic elections.
Randomized vignette 1	Strong peace—Lately in Country A, following recent elections that were widely viewed as free and fair, the government has undergone a peaceful change in the dominant political party. Independent media and national NGOs are flourishing.
Randomized vignette 2	Mild peace—Lately in Country A, tension between opposition groups and the government has declined. Parts of the peace agreement(s) are being implemented and the population generally feels safe to move about the territory.
Randomized vignette 3	Mild violence—Lately in Country A, tension between opposition groups and the government has grown. The government is responding to the tension by detaining opposition politicians and placing restrictions on independent media outlets and national NGOs.
Randomized vignette 4	Strong violence—Lately in Country A, violence has significantly increased. Opposition groups and the government are increasingly using violence, resulting in dozens of civilian deaths and the displacement of hundreds of people.

QID108). Another respondent focused on the modalities that donors would use to distribute aid in this context: “If the government was non-cooperative, we would likely decrease spending through government channels and increase spending through multilateral, INGO and NGO partners” (respondent 673, QID169, QID109). For these respondents, then, donors increase humanitarian aid in strong and mild violence contexts, both to respond to the needs of the population and to continue giving aid to the country while also reducing the risk that this aid directly supports or finances the recipient government’s policies or behaviors.

In reference to transitional aid, our respondents did not comment directly on why they indicated that donors would increase transitional aid across all treatments. Their open-ended responses focused on the trade-offs between humanitarian and development aid, which comprise the vast majority of ODA.¹⁴ Transitional financing is intended to help conflict-affected countries transition “out of conflict toward sustainable development” by bridging the gap between traditional humanitarian aid that bypasses the government and development aid that aims to directly support it (OECD 2010b, 32). Given that each of our treatment scenarios represented a country that is attempting to make this type of war-to-peace transition, it is presumably unsurprising that respondents indicated that donors would increase transitional aid in all cases.

While figure 1 descriptively depicts how our aid experts believe donors will allocate different combinations of aid in response to our treatment scenarios, figure 2 presents their statistical significance using the predicted probabilities for a multinomial logistic regression with the four aid types as

14. In 2018, of the aid that OECD donors gave fragile states, 62% was classified as development, 25% as humanitarian, and only 13% as transitional (OECD 2020, 48).

dependent variables and the four treatment types as independent variables.¹⁵ We focus our discussion on the results that diverge from figure 1 as well as those that pinpoint the specific effects of our four treatment scenarios.

In response to our treatments that signal progression toward postconflict peace (hypothesis 1, strong peace; hypothesis 2, mild peace), our aid experts indicate that donors will increase development, budgetary, and transitional aid, largely as expected. The budgetary aid increase is significant in relation to strong peace but not mild peace, which also aligns with our expectations. Although our respondents are more likely to select a decrease in humanitarian aid in these scenarios, the confidence intervals for increase and decrease slightly overlap, pointing to respondents’ uncertainty with regard to humanitarian aid shifts as postconflict conditions improve. On the one hand, respondents argue: “If there is more peace . . . there will be a shift from humanitarian assistance to development, e.g. less food security and livelihoods, more education, peace building and economic development/micro-enterprise” (respondent 105, QID233, QID108). On the other hand, they argue that humanitarian aid “should not change dramatically as long as there is humanitarian need” (respondent 484, QID112, QID193).

As expected, in response to our treatments that signal regression toward potential renewed war (hypothesis 3, mild violence; hypothesis 4, strong violence), respondents indicated that donors would increase aid that bypasses the government (humanitarian and transitional aid) and decrease

15. Appendix B presents the corresponding regression results and distributions of our dependent variables (tables 5 and 6) and potential heterogeneous treatment effects (figs. 7–12), and it shows that results are robust to different testing strategies—*t*-test (fig. 6), Wilcoxon rank-sum test (table 11), Bonferroni correction (fig. 13), and seemingly unrelated probit regression (table 9)—and the addition of control variables (table 10).

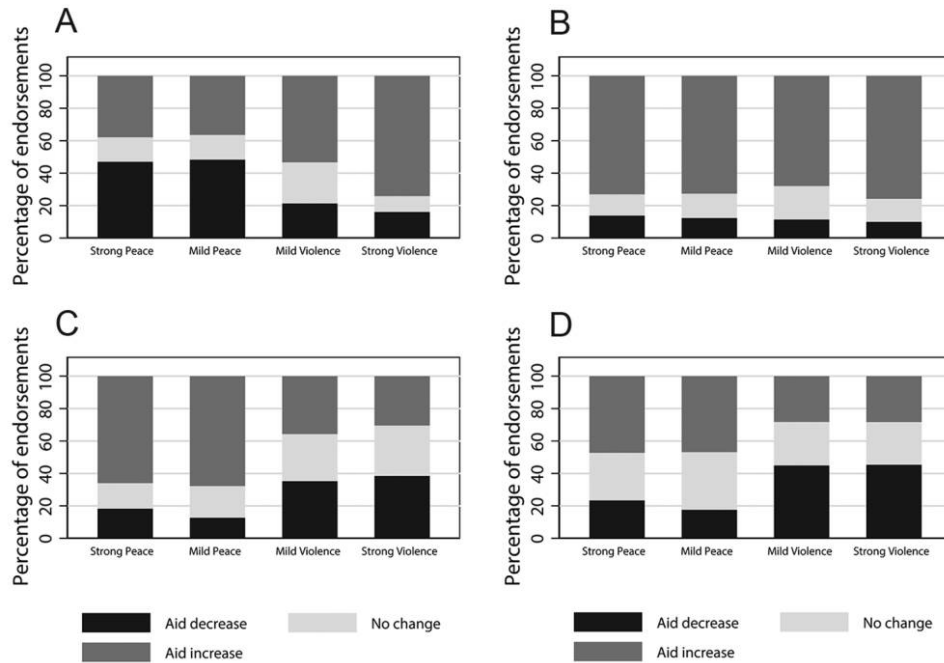


Figure 1. Number of respondents endorsing that donors will decrease, not change, or increase aid by scenario: A, humanitarian aid; B, transitional aid; C, development aid; D, budgetary aid.

aid that directly supports the government (budgetary aid). The magnitude of the predicted increase in humanitarian aid under strong violence is, unsurprisingly, greater than under mild violence. As one respondent commented, most donors increase humanitarian aid flows and reduce development aid in response to intense violence and the likely further “outbreak/intensification/spread of conflict and violence on civilians (leading to massive displacement of people, sexual gender-based violence, and trauma); increased food insecurity (including famine in some location and high levels of malnutrition); increased disease burden (including cholera outbreak and high incidences of malaria)” (respondent 56, QID179, QID120). Another respondent explained the logic behind reductions in budgetary aid: “Direct budget support is nearly always cut entirely for fiduciary reasons, i.e. it is difficult to track and account for the use of funds in any reliable way, as well as for political reasons, i.e. donors do not want to be seen to be backing a particular side of the ‘conflict’” (respondent 215, QID233, QID108).

Contrary to our expectations, although respondents indicate that donors decrease development aid in response to strong violence, the results are not significant. Furthermore, for the mild violence treatment, respondents are as likely to indicate that donors will increase development aid as they are to indicate that donors will decrease development aid. Our open-ended responses help to explain these results. According to one respondent, even if donors want to reduce development aid, they may be unable to because aid “is often

‘locked-in’ for a several years (at least 2) and will not change rapidly” (respondent 493, QID243). This is supported by the aid literature, which argues that donors are incentivized to spend money, not to withdraw it (Martens et al. 2002; Natsios 2011). Another respondent indicated that donors may be unwilling to reduce aid because they fear losing influence with the recipient government: “If the aid allocation is decreasing, there will obviously be a decrease in influence” (respondent 113, Q250, QID247). Another responded added that increasing competition from nontraditional donors may reduce the impact of OECD conditionality, making OECD donors even more reluctant to decrease aid: “even if ‘traditional’ donors like OECD countries stop or decrease their aid to some countries due to some negative events, it has less impact than before, as these ‘new donors’ can supplement the absence of major donors by providing aid” (respondent 51, QID112, QID193).

CONCLUSION

To understand how donors allocate aid in response to changes in postconflict countries, where aid shifts may be underreported, we surveyed over 1,130 aid workers across 186 countries. Our respondents indicate that when donors receive signals that the postconflict country is promoting inclusive politics and population-focused security, donors increase development and budgetary aid that supports the recipient government and transitional aid that supports peace building. When donors receive signals that the postconflict country is regressing toward violence, donors increase

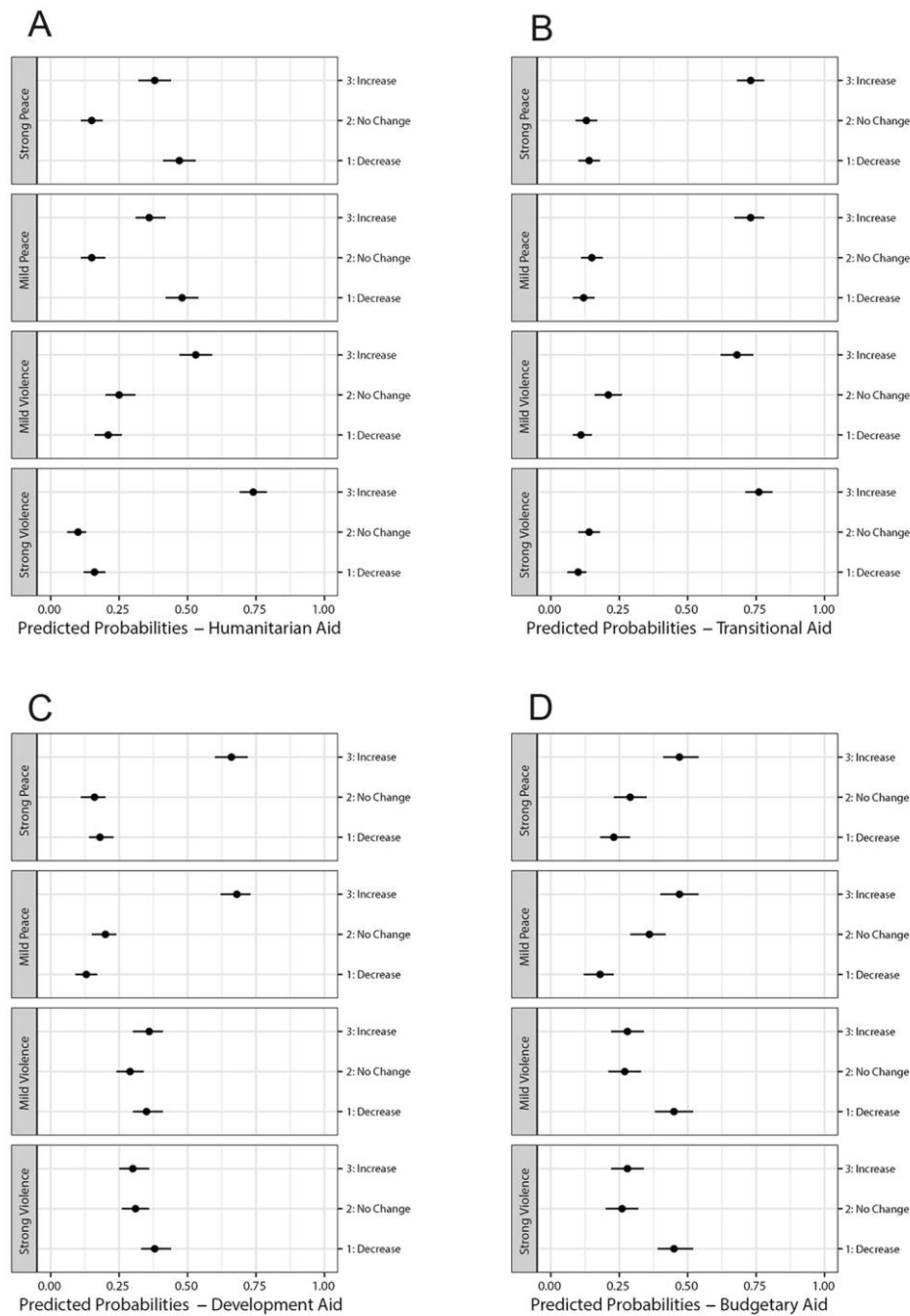


Figure 2. Dots show predicted probabilities based on multinomial regression. Lines correspond to 95% confidence intervals. A, Humanitarian aid; B, transitional aid; C, development aid; D, budgetary aid.

humanitarian aid that bypasses the government and transitional aid that aims to revive the peace process. They also withdraw budgetary aid that directly funds the government. In contrast to these clear patterns, our respondents are much less certain about the likelihood of decreases in humanitarian and development aid and argue that increases in transitional aid are likely across all scenarios.

Our aid experts reveal a more dynamic relationship between the country context and donor aid allocation than

previously outlined in the scholarly literature. First, while the aid literature views allocation as a top-down instrument of foreign policy (Alesina and Dollar 2000; Bermeo 2018; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009), we show that aid to postconflict countries is also shaped by rapidly changing political and security events within these countries. Second, while existing aid-allocation literature aggregates all ODA, addresses only one type of aid (Narang 2014), or divides aid into bypass aid and government-to-government aid (Dietrich

2013; Knack 2013), we demonstrate that further aid disaggregation allows us to capture unobserved changes in aid allocation to postconflict contexts and pinpoint how donors substitute humanitarian, transitional, development, and budgetary aid in response to changes in the country's political and security dynamics.

This analysis also has potentially important policy implications. First, our aid experts' support for transitional aid in all scenarios, even though it is the most underfunded type of aid, indicates that donors should consider increasing the amount of transitional aid available to postconflict countries. Second, our respondents' uncertainty about decreases in development aid point to the difficulty that donors face in discouraging regression toward potential renewed war. On the one hand, while "donor influence on the country depends on how consistent the allocation is" (respondent 58, Q250, QID247), sustained aid levels can also directly or indirectly support the recipient government's increasingly violent and repressive behaviors (Uvin 1998). On the other hand, if donors withdraw development aid in the face of rising violence, they may further destabilize the country's peace process and inhibit third-party and domestic peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace-building efforts (Autesserre 2021; Beardsley 2011; Matanock 2020; Walter et al. 2021). In addition, if OECD donors attempt to use aid to sanction postconflict countries, they may turn "to non-traditional donors (non-OECD donors that is, e.g. China, Russia etc . . .) for another type of support" (respondent 297, Q250, QID247), reducing the effect of OECD aid withdrawal. As a result, OECD donors may be much more successful at using aid to support postconflict countries that are progressing toward peace than compelling countries that are regressing toward war to reverse course. The main policy implication is that, particularly in countries signaling regression toward potential renewed war, donors should carefully evaluate whether and how they aid war and peace.

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